



Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

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TO: House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs (Rep. Head, *Chair*; Rep. Moran, *Vice Chair*; Rep. Savage, *Ranking Member*; Rep. O'Sullivan; Rep. Stevens, *Clerk*; Rep. Van Wyck; Rep. Vowinkel; and Rep. Weed)

FROM: Karen Schwartz, Executive Director

DATE: April 11, 2013

RE: S. 59 ~ An Act Relating to Independent Direct Support Providers

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the collective bargaining bill for direct support providers. I am here on behalf of the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council, and as the parent of a young man with a developmental disability.

The bill represents a step forward towards assuring that there is a stable workforce of people who can earn a livable wage by supporting people with disabilities to be part of community life. However, the bill as passed is unique in being a union bill that leaves out the employers from the process – the individuals with disabilities and/or family members who hire and supervise the independent direct support workers.

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council is one of 56 Councils across the U.S. whose role, by federal law, is to bring the voice of people with developmental disabilities and families to the policymaking table in the design and implementation of laws, policies and programs. The functional federal definition of developmental disability we use goes beyond Vermont's developmental services system to encompass Children's Personal Care Services, Choices for Care and other programs that serve people with a range of physical disabilities like Attendant Care Services ~ in short, the programs that are covered by S. 59.

Direct support workers are key to realizing the values that are at the core of the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act: recognition that disability is a natural part of life, and that people with developmental disabilities can exercise self-determination, be independent, be productive, and be integrated and included in all facets of community life.

As a parent I have had direct experience as an employer of record in 3 circumstances that fit within the framework of S. 59: managing Children's Personal Care Services for my son; managing respite services when my son lived with me as part of an agency-managed waiver package; and family-managing the full range of waiver services. As an employer of record I obtained a federal employer I.D.; hired, supervised and terminated employees when necessary, and did payroll.

As an employer I know the importance of being able to pay a livable wage and provide basic benefits people need to continue in this work, and for it to be a career path. Like any employer, people with disabilities and family members also need a voice at the table when decisions are being made that impact the work they are paying people to get done. We should not be left out of the process, and out of the bill. Please carefully consider including a council as part of the legislation.

Thank you.